

WEST NORRITON, PA — On Saturday, February 14, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) spoke at the fifth annual Black History Month Luncheon and Cultural Celebration hosted by the Greater Norristown NAACP at Westover Country Club in West Norriton. The theme of the event was “Uniting Past and Present.” The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was founded on February 12, 1909 – the 100th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln’s birthday. Today, it is the nation’s oldest and largest civil rights organization, working tirelessly to fulfill its mission “to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate racial hatred and racial discrimination.” The NAACP lobbies Congress daily, works to increase voter registration, and fights discrimination in employment, housing, education, criminal justice, and health care.

“The NAACP’s impact on the United States today must not be understated,” said Congressman Sestak. “This exceptional organization has worked relentlessly to realize the most powerful truth of our Declaration of Independence -- that all men are created equal. When our society failed to deliver on the promise of that principle, the NAACP stood tall and refused to allow our leaders to forget the sacred promise made by our founding fathers that all Americans must be equal before the law. We, as citizens, continue to rely on the NAACP to remind us that our country will never be as great and as prosperous as it might if we fail to recognize and encourage the dignity and ability of all of our citizens. The NAACP is an institution that has earned the respect of all for its defense of civil rights.”

The congressman recalled the lessons taught to him by his father, who witnessed the unfairness of the segregation that was part of life in the armed forces during WWII. “We discussed irony of the situation wherein our country sought to destroy the hate and intolerance of fascism while at the same time denying our own citizens and soldiers the basic freedoms that they were fighting and dying to preserve for their fellow Americans,” said Congressman Sestak. “It pained me greatly to note that when I entered the Navy during the Vietnam War, many of the same injustices were still prevalent throughout our armed forces. Since that time, it has been my personal mission to see that people of all races, genders, religions, and orientations receive the respect, decency, and equality with which they were created.”

“As the Director of Defense Policy in the National Security Council, I was honored to assist in delivering the Medal of Honor to seven individuals who fought with valor and honor in World War II. Among that group was Lieutenant Vernon Baker who received the long overdue Medal of Honor. That day in 1997 renewed my faith in the American character. Had it not been for the dogged determination of the NAACP, a brave warrior might never have received the recognition he deserved and our nation would have been forever tarnished by that omission.”

The Congressmen addressed members of the NAACP and other distinguished guests, including State Representatives, the Norristown Municipal Council, the Superintendent of Norristown Schools, administrators of Cheyney University, and labor leaders from the District Council of Philadelphia. The keynote address was delivered by Ms. Ahmeenah Young, President & CEO of the Philadelphia Convention Center. Honorees included Mr. Charles Blockson, Norristown native and noted African American historian; Mr. Richard C. Johnson, entrepreneur; Mrs. Alice Davenport, first African American teacher in the Norristown Area School District; and, posthumously, Mrs. Frances Haynes, past Norristown NAACP president/community leader and Dr. William Rodgers, III, noted Norristown physician and founder of Montgomery Hospital's Family Practice Program.

In honor of the 100th Anniversary of the founding of the NAACP, Congressman Sestak (PA-07) entered a citation into the Congressional Record recognizing the many contributions local NAACP branches have made to the 7th District. The citation commends the exceptional work of the Media, Darby Area, Yeadon, Norristown, Mainline, Chester, West Chester, and Philadelphia branches. The Congressman is also proud to announce that he co-sponsored legislation (H.Con.Res. 35) honoring and praising the NAACP on the occasion of its anniversary that passed by a vote of 424 to 0.

It was Congressman Sestak's privilege to present the following Congressional Citation:

I am honored to recognize the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for a century of dedicated service to ensuring equality among us all. Founded on February 12, 1909, the NAACP is the nation's oldest grassroots civil rights organization. In the 7th Congressional District I and my constituency are blessed to have access to the leadership and legislative skills of Darrell Jones of the Chester Branch, Sheila A. Carter of the Darby Area Branch, Reverend Albert G. Davis of the Main Line Branch, Dr. Joan Duval-Flynn of the Media Branch, M. Lana Shells of the Greater Norristown Branch, J. Whyatt Mondesire of the Philadelphia Branch, Alice Hammond of the West Chester, and Linda Osinupedi of the Yeadon Branch. Under their direction, the NAACP remains a vital and effective organization capable of fulfilling its mission "to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate racial hatred and racial discrimination." I am honored to encourage the NAACP to a second century of continued service to the residents of the 7th Congressional District of Pennsylvania. Were it not for the NAACP acting as such a pillar of decency, responsibility and civic fortitude, ours would be a much lesser nation.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.

###